

## Chapter 21

### From *The Sadler Report of the House of Commons*<sup>1</sup>

Although children were among the ideal workers in the factories of the industrial revolution, according to many factory owners, increasingly their exploitation became a concern of the British Parliament. One important parliamentary investigation, chaired by Michael Sadler, took volumes of testimony from child workers and older people who had worked as children in the mines and factories. The following is a sample of the testimony gathered in the Sadler Report. The report led to child-labor reform in the Factory Act of 1833.

What seem to be the causes of Crabtree's distress? How could they have been alleviated?

#### *Thinking Historically*

To what extent are the problems faced by Matthew Crabtree the inevitable results of machine production? To what extent are his problems caused by capitalism? How might the owner of this factory have addressed these issues?

If you asked the owner why he didn't pay more, shorten the workday, provide more time for meals, or provide medical assistance when it was needed, how do you think he would have responded? Do you think Crabtree would have been in favor of reduced hours if it meant reduced wages?

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#### *Friday, 18 May 1832 – Michael Thomas Sadler, Esquire, in the Chair*

Mr. Matthew Crabtree, *called in; and Examined.*

What age are you? – *Twenty-two.*

What is your occupation? – *A blanket manufacturer.*

Have you ever been employed in a factory? – *Yes.*

At what age did you first go to work in one? – *Eight.*

How long did you continue in that occupation? – *Four years.*

Will you state the hours of labour at the period when you first sent to the factory, in ordinary times? – *From 6 in the morning to 8 at night.*

Fourteen hours? – *Yes.*

With what intervals for refreshment and rest? – *An hour at noon.*

Then you had no resting time allowed in which to take your breakfast, or what is in Yorkshire called your "drinking"? – *No.*

When trade was brisk what were your hours? – *From 5 in the morning to 9 in the evening.*

Sixteen hours? – *Yes.*

With what intervals at dinner? – *An hour.*

How far did you live from the mill? – *About two miles.*

Was there any time allowed for you to get your breakfast in the mill? – *No.*

Did you take it before you left your home? – *Generally.*

During those long hours of labour could you be punctual: how did you awake? – *I seldom did awake spontaneously; I was most generally awoke or lifted out of bed, sometimes asleep, by my parents.*

Were you always in time? – *No.*

What was the consequence if you had been too late? – *I was most commonly beaten.*

Severely? – *Very severely, I thought.*

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<sup>1</sup> From *The Sadler Report: Report from the Committee on the Bill to Regulate the Labour of Children in the Mills and Factories of the United Kingdom* (London: The House of Commons, 1832).

1 In whose factory was this? – *Messrs. Hague & Cook's, of Dewsbury.*  
2 Will you state the effect that those long hours had upon the state of your health and feelings? – *I*  
3 *was, when working those long hours, commonly very much fatigued at night, when I left my work; so*  
4 *much so that I sometimes should have slept as I walked if I had not stumbled and started awake again;*  
5 *and so sick often that I could not eat, and what I did eat I vomited.*  
6 Did this labour destroy your appetite? – *It did.*  
7 In what situation were you in that mill? – *I was a piecener.*  
8 Will you state to this Committee whether piecening is a very laborious employment for children,  
9 or not? – *It is very laborious employment. Pieceners are continually running to and fro, and on their feet*  
10 *the whole day.*  
11 The duty of the piecener is to take the cardings from one part of the machinery, and to place them  
12 on another? – *Yes.*  
13 So that the labour is not only continual, but it is unabated to the last? – *It is unabated to the last.*  
14 Do you not think, from your own experience, that the speed of the machinery is so calculated as  
15 to demand the utmost exertions of a child supposing the hours were moderate? – *It is as much as they*  
16 *could do at the best; they are always upon the stretch, and it is commonly very difficult to keep up with*  
17 *their work.*  
18 State the condition of the children toward the latter part of the day, who have thus to keep up with  
19 the machinery. – *It is as much as they can do when they are not very much fatigued to keep up with their*  
20 *work, and toward the close of the day, when they come to be more fatigued, they cannot keep up with it*  
21 *very well, and the consequence is that they are beaten to spur them on.*  
22 Were you beaten under those circumstances? – *Yes.*  
23 Frequently? – *Very frequently.*  
24 And principally at the latter end of the day? – *Yes.*  
25 And is it your belief that if you had not been so beaten, you should not have got through the  
26 work? – *I should not if I had not been kept up to it by some means.*  
27 Does beating then principally occur at the latter end of the day, when the children are exceedingly  
28 fatigued? – *It does at the latter end of the day, and in the morning sometimes, when they are very drowsy,*  
29 *and have not got rid of the fatigue of the day before.*  
30 What were you beaten with principally? – *A strap.*  
31 Anything else? – *Yes, a stick sometimes; and there is a kind of roller which runs on the top of the*  
32 *machine called a billy, perhaps two or three yards in length, and perhaps an inch and a half, or more in*  
33 *diameter; the circumference would be four or five inches; I cannot speak exactly.*  
34 Were you beaten with that instrument? – *Yes.*  
35 Have you yourself been beaten, and have you seen other children struck severely with that roller?  
36 – *I have been struck very severely with it myself, so much so as to knock me down, and I have seen other*  
37 *children have their heads broken with it.*  
38 You think that it is a general practice to beat the children with the roller? – *It is.*  
39 You do not think then that you were worse treated than other children in the mill? – *No, I was not,*  
40 *perhaps not so bad as some were.*  
41 In those mills is chastisement towards the latter part of the day going on perpetually? –  
42 *Perpetually.*  
43 So that you can hardly be in a mill without hearing constant crying? – *Never an hour, I believe.*  
44 Do you think that if the overlooker were naturally a humane person it would be still found  
45 necessary for him to beat the children in order to keep up their attention and vigilance at the termination  
46 of those extraordinary days of labour? – *Yes, the machine turns off a regular quantity of cardings, and of*  
47 *course they must keep as regularly to their work the whole of the day; they must keep with the machine,*  
48 *and therefore however humane the slubber may be, as he must keep up with the machine or be found fault*  
49 *with, he spurs the children to keep up also by various means but that which he commonly resorts to is to*  
50 *strap them when they become drowsy.*

1 At the time when you were beaten for not keeping up with your work, were you anxious to have  
2 done it if you possibly could? – *Yes; the dread of being beaten if we could not keep up with our work was*  
3 *a sufficient impulse to keep us to it if we could.*

4 When you got home at night after this labour, did you feel much fatigued? – *Very much so.*

5 Had you any time to be with your parents, and to receive instruction from them? – *No.*

6 What did you do? – *All that we did when we got home was to get the little bit of supper that was*  
7 *provided for us and go to bed immediately. If the supper had not been ready directly, we should have*  
8 *gone to sleep while it was preparing.*

9 Did you not, as a child, feel it a very grievous hardship to be roused so soon in the morning? – *I*  
10 *did.*

11 Were the rest of the children similarly circumstanced? – *Yes, all of them; but they were not all of*  
12 *them so far from their work as I was.*

13 And if you had been too late you were under the apprehension of being cruelly beaten? – *I*  
14 *generally was beaten when I happened to be too late; and when I got up in the morning the apprehension*  
15 *of that was so great, that I used to run, and cry all the way as I went to the mill.*

16 That was the way by which your punctual attendance was secured? – *Yes.*

17 And you do not think it could have been secured by any other means? – *No.*

18 Then it is your impression from what you have seen, and from your own experience, that those  
19 long hours of labour have the effect of rendering young persons who are subject to them exceedingly  
20 unhappy? – *Yes.*

21 You have already said it had a considerable effect upon your health? – *Yes.*

22 Do you conceive that it diminished your growth? – *I did not pay much attention to that; but I*  
23 *have been examined by some persons who said they thought I was rather stunted, and that I should have*  
24 *been taller if I had not worked at the mill.*

25 What were your wages at that time? – *Three shillings (per week).*

26 And how much a day had you for overwork when you were worked so exceedingly long? – *A*  
27 *halfpenny a day.*

28 Did you frequently forfeit that if you were not always there to a moment? – *Yes; I most frequently*  
29 *forfeited what was allowed for those long hours.*

30 You took your food to the mill; was it in your mill, as is the case in cotton mills, much spoiled by  
31 being laid aside? – *It was very frequently covered by flues from the wool; and in that case they had to be*  
32 *blown off with the mouth, and picked off with the fingers before it could be eaten.*

33 So that not giving you a little leisure for eating your food, but obliging you to take it at the mill,  
34 spoiled your food when you did get it? – *Yes, very commonly.*

35 And that at the same time that this over-labour injured your appetite? – *Yes.*

36 Could you eat when you got home? – *Not always.*

37 What is the effect of this piecening upon the hands? – *It makes them bleed; the skin is completely*  
38 *rubbed off, and in that case they bleed in perhaps a dozen parts.*

39 The prominent parts of the hand? – *Yes, all the prominent parts of the hand are rubbed down till*  
40 *they bleed; every day they are rubbed in that way.*

41 All the time you continue at work? – *All the time we are working. The hands never can be*  
42 *hardened in that work, for the grease keeps them soft in the first instance, and long and continual rubbing*  
43 *is always wearing them down, so that if they were hard they would be sure to bleed.*

44 It is attended with much pain? – *Very much.*

45 Do they allow you to make use of the back of the hand? – *No; the work cannot be so well done*  
46 *with the back of the hand, or I should have made use of that.*